

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA
ASHEVILLE DIVISION
1:16-cv-00307-FDW

KEVIN COX,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	ORDER
)	
MRS. J. JENKINS, et al.,)	
)	
Defendants.)	
_____)	

THIS MATTER is before the Court on consideration of the pro se complaint filed by Plaintiff pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. For the reasons that follow, this civil action will be dismissed.¹

Plaintiff is a prisoner of the State of North Carolina who is presently confined in the Marion Correctional Institution. In his complaint, Plaintiff alleges that the defendants have subjected him to excessive punishment.

Plaintiff is a state prisoner; therefore he is bound by the mandatory requirements of the Prisoner Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”) which provides that a prisoner must exhaust his administrative remedies prior to the commencement of a civil action under § 1983. The PLRA provides, in pertinent part that “[n]o action shall be brought with respect to prison conditions

¹ Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(A)(a), “[t]he court shall review . . . a complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity.” Following this initial review the “court shall identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion of the complaint, if the complaint—(1) is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.” Id. § 1915A(b)(1). In conducting this review, the Court must determine whether the complaint raises an indisputably meritless legal theory or is founded upon clearly baseless factual contentions, such as fantastic or delusional scenarios. Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327-28 (1989). A pro se complaint must be construed liberally. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972). However, the liberal construction requirement will not permit a district court to ignore a clear failure to allege facts in the complaint which set forth a claim that is cognizable under Federal law. Weller v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387, 391 (4th Cir. 1990).

under section 1983 of this title, or any other Federal law, by a prisoner confined in any jail, prison, or other correctional facility until such administrative remedies as are available are exhausted.” 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a).

In Porter v. Nussle, 534 U.S. 516 (2002), the Supreme Court held that the PLRA’s exhaustion requirement applies to all inmate suits about prison life and the Court noted that “exhaustion in cases covered by § 1997e(a) is now mandatory.” Id. at 524 (citing Booth v. Churner, 532 U.S. 731, 739 (2001)). The Porter Court went on to stress that the exhaustion requirement must be met before commencement of the suit. Id. Whether an inmate has properly exhausted his administrative remedies is a matter to be determined by referencing the law of the state where the prisoner is housed and where the allegations supporting the complaint arose. See Jones v. Bock, 549 U.S. 199, 218 (2007) (“The level of detail necessary in a grievance to comply with the grievance procedures will vary from system to system and claim to claim, but it is the prison’s requirements, and not the PLRA, that define the boundaries of proper exhaustion.”).

The Fourth Circuit has determined that the PLRA does not require that an inmate allege or demonstrate that he has exhausted his administrative remedies. Anderson v. XYZ Corr. Health Servs., 407 F.3d 674 (4th Cir. 2005). Indeed, failure to exhaust administrative remedies is an affirmative defense, but the Court is not prohibited from sua sponte examining the issue of exhaustion in reviewing the complaint. As the Fourth Circuit observed:

[A]n inmate’s failure to exhaust administrative remedies is an affirmative defense to be pleaded and proven by the defendant. That exhaustion is an affirmative defense, however, does not preclude the district court from dismissing a complaint where the failure to exhaust is apparent from the face of the complaint, nor does it preclude the district court from inquiring on its own motion into whether the inmate exhausted all administrative remedies.

Anderson, 407 F.3d at 683.

In North Carolina, state prisoners must complete a three-step administrative remedy procedure (the “ARP”) in order to properly exhaust their administrative remedies. See N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 148-118.1 to 148-118.9 (Article 11A: Corrections Administrative Remedy Procedure); Moore v. Bennette, 517 F.3d 717, 721 (4th Cir. 2008) (discussing the ARP).

In his complaint, Plaintiff admits that he did not exhaust his administrative remedies prior to filing the complaint and the Step Three response was decided on September 19, 2016, which is at least four days after he mailed his complaint. (Doc. No. 9). It is well-settled that “a prisoner does not comply with the mandatory requirements of 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a) by exhausting his administrative remedies during the course of litigation; exhaustion must occur before the filing of the lawsuit, or the case must be dismissed.” Woodward v. Daughtry, 845 F. Supp. 2d 681, 684 (W.D.N.C. 2012) (citing Moore, supra at 725)).

Based on the foregoing, the Court finds that Plaintiff failed to exhaust his administrative remedies prior to filing his complaint and it therefore must be dismissed.

IT IS, THEREFORE, ORDERED that:

1. Plaintiff’s complaint is **DISMISSED**. (Doc. No. 1).
2. Plaintiff’s motion to appoint counsel is **DENIED WITHOUT PREJUDICE**. (Doc. No. 6).
3. Plaintiff’s motion for a preliminary injunction is **DENIED WITHOUT PREJUDICE**. (Doc. No. 7).

The Clerk of Court is respectfully directed to close this civil case.

SO ORDERED.

Signed: October 20, 2016



Frank D. Whitney
3 Chief United States District Judge

